DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 357 530 EC 302 072

AUTHOR	Chen, Deborah; McCann, Mary Ellen
TITLE	Selecting a Program: A Guide for Parents of Infants & Preschoolers with Visual Impairments.
INSTITUTION	Blind Childrens Center, Los Angeles, CA.
PUB DATE	93
NOTE	33p.; Photographs will not reproduce well.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Classroom Environment; *Early Intervention; *Evaluation Criteria; Guidelines; Infants; *Parent Participation; Preschool Children; Preschool Education; *Program Evaluation; *Selection; Teamwork; Toddlers; *Visual Impairments

ABSTRACT

Intended for parents of infants and preschoolers with visual impairments, this booklet encourages parent involvement in all aspects of educational programming for their children and provides guidelines for selection of a suitable program. The first section examines the stresses involved during transitions from one program to another. Parents are urged to be active members of the child's educational team by making observations, creating a "snapshot" of the child for the team, identifying what the family thinks is important, keeping records, planning for meetings, and dealing effectively with professionals. The relationship of program choice to the overall family situation is noted. General and specific guidelines in selecting a program are addressed, including general atmosphere; social environment; physical environment; learning environment; and specific features of infant programs, preschool programs, and kindergarten programs. Specific guidelines are also offered to help evaluate a program from the child's point of view. These include looking at the learning environment, teacher competency, and transition issues. Also included are some suggestions for helping the child during the first few weeks of a new program. (DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED357530

Blind Childrens Center

Selecting a Program

A guide for parents of infants & preschoolers with visual impairments

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Mardi Robers

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Deborah Chen, Ph.D. and Mary Ellen McCann, M.A.

EC 302 072

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Introduction

All parents face many decisions about their children: what to allow them to do, which schools to choose, and what limits to set. As a parent of a child with a visual impairment, you face many additional decisions and must find different ways of doing things. Your child may first go to programs for infants, and later, for preschoolers, before entering kindergarten. The aim of this booklet is to help you select the program you think is best for your child, and to help you during transitions. This booklet focuses on how you select a program rather than on ways of locating a program in your particular community. How you find and use resources will depend on where you live.

Deborah Chen, Ph.D.
Mary Ellen McCann, M.A.

Table of contents

2 Transitions
- Dealing with feelings
- What parents can do

7 Being an active member of your child's team
- Making observations
- Creating a snapshot of your child
- Identifying what your family thinks is important
- Keeping records
- Planning for meetings
- Dealing with professionals

15 A focus on families

17 Guidelines for selecting a program
- Where to start
- What to look for

23 The unique learning needs of young children with visual impairments
- Transition questions

26 Handling the first few weeks

27 Final thoughts

Transitions

Transition means giving up something comfortable and familiar, and getting used to something new. Transition is an ongoing process which can be stressful, especially when the change involves relationships with people who work closely with you and your child.

Your child's life will be marked by several significant transitions, such as changing from an infant to a preschool program, and graduating from preschool and entering kindergarten. Each of these transitions opens up new opportunities for learning, and marks an important step in your child's development.

Dealing with feelings

Accomplishing something new is very satisfying. Doing something that one has never done before can be exciting, but not knowing what's going to happen is also a bit scary. Some parents find the transition from one program to another to be a difficult and emotional time. They may experience anger, disappointment, guilt, depression, and anxiety—especially if it is hard to find the program they want. These feelings may be related to the family's separation from a familiar program, from trusted staff, from a comfortable routine, from seeing other parents regularly, and from earlier expectations of the child. These are natural feelings that come with saying *good-bye*, and with making changes. Transition is an ongoing process in your child's education.

Not finding the right program is extremely frustrating. Some programs may not meet all your expectations or provide the services your child needs. Finding a program that is right for your child can be hard work and a complicated process. Even when the program seems *perfect*, you may have mixed feelings about the change. It can be hard to leave an old program, or lose the personal attention from trusted people. But, most of all, it means starting over once again. At first it may seem very confusing—

Everyone involved can have mixed feelings about the change to a new program.

there are new forms to fill out, different services to find out about, new words to understand, and different ways of getting what your child needs.

Everyone involved can have mixed feelings about the change to a new program. Staff from the old program may feel protective of you and your child, especially if they don't know the staff at the new program. Sometimes programs have different approaches and the old staff may not agree with the new program's approach.

Children also have feelings about changing programs. Some dislike changes in routines and do not take easily to new people or new things. In a new program, your child will have to get used to a different routine, new people, different toys, and unfamiliar activities. In the first few weeks your child may behave differently and may even seem to forget things he or she knew how to do. In time, your child will adjust to the new program, and the new staff will become familiar with him.

It is a good idea to prepare your child for the transition by visiting the new program ahead of time, and by talking about the new school and the people there. You can also stay in your child's

classroom for a little while on the first day. This visit not only provides security for your child, it presents an opportunity for you to get to know the new program.

Parents need to get used to a different program too. As your child gets older, your contact with program staff will change. For instance, infant programs usually provide home visits while most preschools do not. Preschool programs typically involve more parent participation than do kindergartens. Compared to infant programs, preschools and kindergartens focus more on the child and less on the family. You may welcome less involvement with your child's program, or you may miss the close contact.

As a parent, you may have many immediate concerns about a new program...

Where is the new program located?
Does it have appropriate equipment and resources?
Will the staff like my child?
Will they know how to teach my child?
How will the other children react to my child?
What will my child learn?
Will I like the program?
How will the staff react to me?
How will my child react to the new program?

How will the other children react to my child?

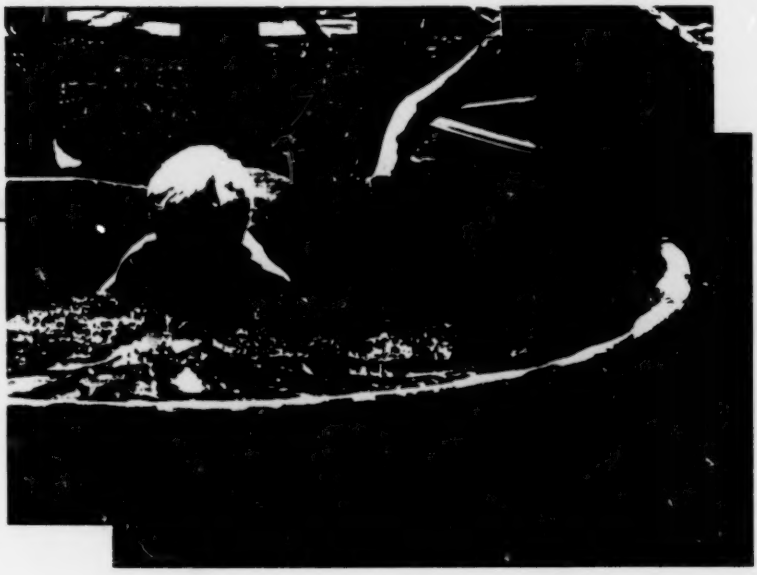
It helps to talk to other parents who have already gone through what you are about to; it helps to know about your choices, and it helps to talk about your concerns. You can cope with program changes by:

Knowing what to expect when your child graduates from a program;
Learning about programs in your community;
Identifying what kind of program your child needs;
Being aware of what is important for your family.

Deciding what to do is not always a simple task, and making a decision can be complicated. Parents often wonder if they are making the right choice. Some parents may put off making a decision because they are afraid of making the wrong one. It helps to know that you can always change your mind: Trust your instincts.

What parents can do

As your child's best advocate, you are the person who can make a real difference in planning your child's education. Talk to everyone: family members, other parents, and professionals.



Compared to infant programs, preschools and kindergartens focus more on the child and less on the family.

Who to talk to

Use the resources in your community. Contact your local educational service agency or private agencies serving children with visual impairments and get information about programs and services. Find someone who can answer your specific questions. Talk to the professionals (for example, doctors, educators, social workers, and psychologists) who already know your child and ask for their program recommendations. If you don't understand the answers, don't hesitate to ask for further explanations.

What questions to ask

Use your family's priorities and concerns to develop your questions.

Questions to ask other parents...

- How old is your child and where is the school?
- What is your child's vision loss?
- What kinds of services is he or she getting?
- How do the other children get along with your child?
- How is your child doing?
- What is different about the new program?
- What do you like?
- What do you dislike or would like to change?

Questions to ask professionals...

- What programs are available in our area?
- What kinds of assessments do these programs require?
- What kinds of services should I ask for?
- How would my child get to these programs?
- Do I have to pay for these services?
- When should I start looking for a new program?
- What do I need to do to start the transition process?

Talk to the professionals who already know your child and ask for their program recommendations.

Being an active member of your child's educational team

You are the most important member of any team planning an educational program for your child. Your knowledge and your family's concerns and goals should be the main focus in making decisions about programs.

The team's members can include teachers, specialists, administrators, family members, and other important people in your child's education. A high quality program recognizes that a parent is the most important adult in a child's life and the most important team member. It helps to work with professionals who can provide information, assistance, and support during your child's transition to a new program.

You are the most important member of any team planning an educational program for your child.

A physical therapist for very young children is trained to address motor problems which influence developmental skills needed in daily life, locomotion, and play.

Selecting and planning a program for your child involves working with professionals from various specialties. With these specialists, you will assess your child's strengths and needs, develop instructional goals, and determine which services are necessary. These professionals include:

An early childhood teacher trained to work with very young children to provide learning experiences specific to this age group.

A teacher of children with visual impairments trained to meet the unique educational needs of these children. This teacher may also be an early childhood specialist.

An orientation and mobility specialist who develops skills in safe and independent mobility in the environment.

A social worker who provides information and assistance in obtaining community resources, as well as guidance and counseling for families.

A psychologist who is responsible for developmental assessments and may also provide the same services as a social worker.

An ophthalmologist who is a medical doctor specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of eye diseases. Treatment may include surgery, medications, eye glasses and contact lenses.

An optometrist who is not a medical doctor but a specialist in assessing functional vision, treating vision problems, and prescribing contact lenses and eye glasses.

An occupational or physical therapist for very young children trained to address motor problems which influence developmental skills needed in daily life, locomotion, and play.

A nurse or physician who monitors the child's health and medical needs and provides information on precautions and limitations.

The team members may accept various responsibilities depending on their training and the program's expectations. The exact number of people on the team will vary according to your child's needs and the community resources available.

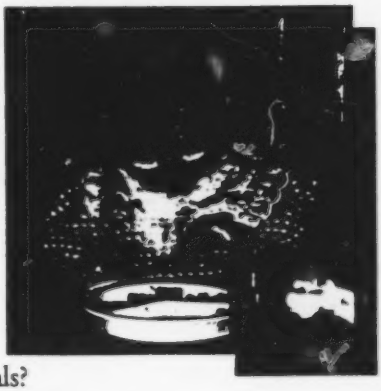
It is helpful to designate one person to coordinate the different services your child may need, and who can keep an eye on your child's total program. You may want to reserve this responsibility for yourself, or you may feel that a teacher or other staff member should have the job. It is important to identify just how much you and your family can do and to find help when you need it. You can manage a seemingly overwhelming task by making a list of what you need to do, then make a step-by-step plan of action. If you do a little bit at a time, it will be easier to complete the task.

The key word is *preparation.* Get everything together beforehand that you'll need when you talk about your child.

Step 1. Making observations

Everyday activities offer the best opportunity for observing your child's behavior because she is in a comfortable and familiar situation with people she trusts. As you watch her going about her daily activities, ask yourself:

What is she doing to communicate?
What does she need help with?
What can she do by herself?
What does she dislike?
What does she like?



Observe...

What happens during meals?
What does he like to play with?
How does he use touch and hearing?
How does he react to new situations?
How is he involved in family activities?
If he has low vision ability, how does he use it?

You know how your child behaves at home and what he can do in a familiar and comfortable environment. This most important information should be shared with your child's educational team.

Step 2. Creating a snapshot of your child

As a parent, you can provide the team with the best *picture* of your child. The following questions will help you develop an accurate picture…

"She needs to use a spoon to feed herself, and needs to participate in group activities."

Who is your child and what is her personality?
What does she like?
What does she dislike?
What are your child's strengths and talents?
What are your child's educational needs?

"Joanne is a playful, active, little girl who likes to be with other children, and gets easily upset by changes in her schedule."

"She likes being around people, loves playing on the monkey bars, and loves to sing."

Step 3. Identifying what your family thinks is important

Each family has specific priorities and concerns for their child. It is important for you to identify what your family thinks is important for your child, what works for your family, and what definitely does not. Use the following questions to develop goals for your child.

What are your dreams?
"I want Ramon to have some friends in the neighborhood."

What are your fears?
"I worry that other children won't like him."

What goals do you want educational programs to work on?
"I think Ramon needs to learn how to play with other children. I want us to concentrate on helping him to make friends rather than learning his numbers."

Step 4. Keeping records

Always request copies of evaluations, medical reports, and other educational information on your child.

Keep records up-to-date.

Organize records so you can find information easily. For example, use a binder with specific sections for medical reports, immunization records, educational assessments, your observations, goals for your child, and any other information you think important.

Step 5. Planning for meetings

It is important to participate in meetings during the transition from one program to another. This is a time to recognize what you and your child have accomplished and to look forward to new experiences. Familiar program staff can prepare you for what to expect, help you handle paperwork and other details, and introduce you to the professionals who will be working with your child. Program staff should inform you of your child's educational rights and what services should be made available to him. Practices will vary depending on where you live and what laws your country has. For example, in the United States, federal law (Public Law 99-457 and Public Law 94-142) requires free and appropriate education for children with disabilities.

Going to a meeting can be anxiety provoking. Sometimes professionals use terms you may not understand. Because there are so many professionals at these meetings, you may feel very alone.

Things to do...

Invite someone (a friend or family member) to go with you to the meeting.

Get your records together and remember to take them.

List the learning opportunities your child needs.

List what services you want a program to provide for your child.

Ask for explanations of any reports or specific words or terms you don't understand.

Develop a list of questions to ask at meetings…

- What are the results of the latest educational assessments on your child?
- What are the recommendations?
- Do you agree with the assessment results and recommendations?
- What other information do you want to share about your child?
- What services will be provided in the new program?
- What can you do at home to help your child make an easy entry into the new program?

Step 6. Dealing with professionals

Parents meet many professionals who provide services in a supportive and caring manner. These specialists ask questions, listen to concerns, and treat parents with respect.

Helpful professionals can include…

The ophthalmologist who takes the time to ask for parent observations and explains the diagnosis in everyday language.

The ophthalmologist

The child's teacher who attends a transition meeting and provides the parents with support and information.

The social worker who respects the parent's point of view and assists the family in solving problems.

Professionals should explain their reports in a clear fashion, ask parents for their opinions and observations, answer questions that parents may have, and listen carefully when others provide information. These professionals are helpful to families and are true team members.

On the other hand, some professionals use terms that others do not understand. They do not include parents in their discussion, tend to not pay attention to reports, and hurry in and out of meetings. It takes a lot of energy to deal with these difficult professionals and get the information you need. As a parent, remember that you have the right to ask and have your questions answered, to have your opinions heard, and to do what you think is best for your child.

Here are some difficult experiences and some ways to deal with them…

"I am tired of all these professionals telling me what to do with my child— like Dr. Know-it-all, Ph.D. I decided to call myself Anna Garcia, P.M.E., for Parent with the Most Experience."

Some professionals are helpful and supportive. Others can be intimidating and insensitive. Experiences with know-it-all people can leave one feeling uninformed and afraid to make decisions. Being fully prepared with your questions and concerns about your child will help motivate professionals to give you information that will be useful in helping your child. If some of them do not recognize the importance of your role, be sure to remind them.

"I came to get information on how to help my child— not to hear that she is mentally retarded."

Some professionals are insensitive and don't know how to communicate with families. A diagnostic label is only helpful if it provides access to services your child needs. Ask for an explanation of any label, what it means in terms of services, and what you can do to help your child.

"Janey's teacher wants me to work on puzzles with her. She hates puzzles. I hate puzzles. and none of the other kids like puzzles. Plus I just haven't had time."

When a professional recommends an activity that does not fit your family's preferences or schedule, be sure to find out why this particular activity is important. Explain why it does not work and then develop other activities which will meet the same goals.

As a parent, remember that you have the right to ask and have your questions answered.

"I want her to attend a regular preschool but the school psychologist said I'd be denying her the specialized services that she needs."

There is a balance between your family values and the services your child needs. Let the professionals know your child will need specialized services and work with them so they provide services in the setting you choose.

"No one at the meeting asked me what I wanted for Billy. I felt invisible and the school staff made all the decisions."

No decisions about your child's educational program should be made without your input and agreement. Be prepared before meetings with your list of questions, concerns, and priorities.

"At the meeting they talked about LRE, IEP, DIS, EAS, and more letters than I could keep up with."

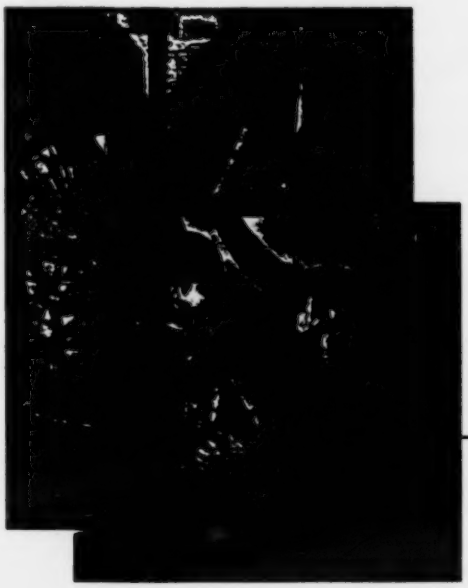
Ask questions when you don't understand. Asking questions is a way to learn and a sign of interest and involvement.

"That teacher said my overprotectiveness would interfere with Mary's development."

Parents are supposed to be protective of their young children. Ask the teacher what she means by *overprotective*, and determine how you can work together to provide the learning opportunities that are important for your child's development.

"It really irks me when I overhear professionals saying one of those difficult parents."

Historically, it is those *difficult* parents who have been leaders in establishing services that are needed by children with impairments. Being an active member of your child's team is one way to make sure your child's educational needs are met.



Let the professionals know your child will need specialized services.

A focus on families

Early childhood special education programs use the terms family-centered, family-focused, or family-guided to encourage a true partnership with families. This attitude is based on legislation in the United States which recognizes the important role the family plays in a young child's development. A child is part of a family, and what affects one member also influences the rest of the family. It is very important to find out what is going to work for you and your family in selecting a program for your child. Families have different cultures, languages, values, and beliefs. Research has shown that educational programs are most successful when they are related to the priorities and concerns of each family.

Think about program choices from your family's point of view...

Where do other children in your family go to school?
Is it important for the child who is visually impaired to go to the same school with his brothers and sisters?
What are your family's concerns about transportation to school?
What type of school program does your family value?
How involved does your family want to be in the school program?
Who pays for the program?

Think about what is important to your family.

One way to identify what is important to your family is by completing this sentence: *It would make a big difference if...* For example, *It would make a big difference if Maria would play outside with kids in the neighborhood.* The best way for Maria to make friends in the neighborhood is to go to the same school. However, because she is totally blind, she will need to learn how to play with other children, participate in games, and get around in the neighborhood. If she goes to the neighborhood school she will need specialized services to develop these skills.

Balance your choices between family values and your child's educational needs. Consider your child's strengths, special talents, and specific learning needs. Trust your instincts!

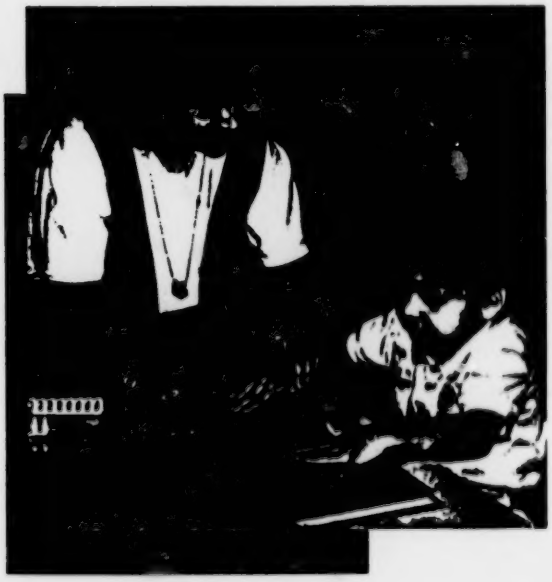
Would it be more advantageous for your child to be in the neighborhood school or in a specialized program?

Guidelines for selecting a program

As a parent, you know your child better than anyone else. You are the expert on your child and you know the kind of program your child needs. It is important to get information on all possible choices before making your decision.

Programs serving very young children with visual impairments include infant programs, preschools, and kindergarten classes run by private or public agencies. These programs may serve both sighted children and those with visual impairments, or be designed specifically for groups of children with impairments. Regardless of the program you select, consider the specialized services your child requires. These services may include, but are not limited to, orientation and mobility, speech and language therapy, occupational or physical therapy, low vision training, and braille instruction.

Programs vary depending on location and resources. In particular, infant programs are set up in a variety of ways. Some provide home visits, others have a program at a center, and some offer a combination of both. In most infant programs there is an emphasis on working with the family to promote the child's development. Some infant programs also offer a number of support services such as referral to other agencies or parent support groups, as well as a trained professional to listen to your concerns and help you deal with them. Infant programs also provide opportunities to meet other families and gain specific information about parenting an infant with a visual impairment.



Consider the specialized services your child requires such as braille instruction.

Sometimes you might be able to create the best program for your child by combining your choices. For example, some children with visual impairments attend a neighborhood preschool for sighted children in the morning and a special preschool in the afternoon.

Be creative in developing your child's program. By combining several options, you may be able to create a program that not only meets your child needs but benefits other children as well. Again, trust your instincts.

Where to start

First, make a list of the learning experiences you want for your child...

- Playing with other children
- Developing orientation and mobility skills
- Developing self help skills
- Developing communication skills

Hand strength is developed through pre-braille activities.

Next, make a list of the services your child will need to develop specific skills...

- Orientation and mobility
- Speech and language therapy
- Physical or occupational therapy
- Low vision training
- Pre-braille or braille instruction

Find out what infant programs, preschools, or kindergartens are available and decide which ones to visit. When you visit the programs, keep these questions in mind...

What does the program have to offer my child?
How will they provide the services my child needs?
What are the staff qualifications?
How many adults and children are in the room?
Can I picture my child with these children?
How are families involved in the program?

It helps to have someone with you to compare notes—another parent who knows your child can be helpful. You can also consider asking your child's present teacher, a family member, or friend to go with you.

It doesn't take long to get an impression of a program and staff. There are times when you will feel perfectly at home in a classroom—it can be comfortable, interesting, and exciting. In other classrooms, you may feel uncomfortable or bored. Pay attention to your feelings. Try to figure out why you reacted in different ways to various classrooms.

Orientation and mobility skills are developed through the use of a cane.

What to look for

Programs have basic characteristics which indicate that your child will be safe and cared for, yet encouraged to explore and learn. During your visits, be aware of the following.

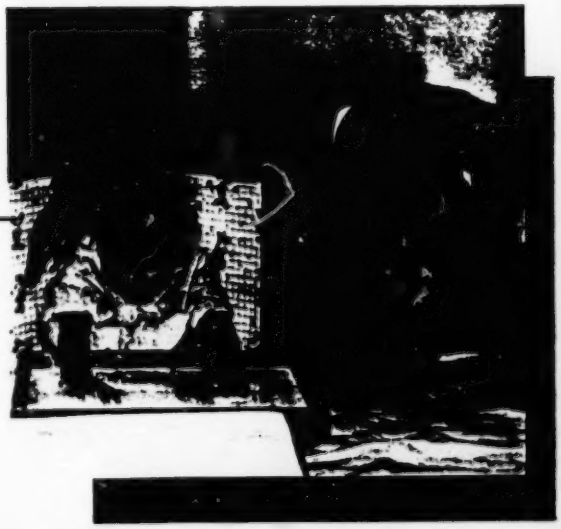
Social environment

Parents are welcome participants
Parents feel comfortable asking questions
Children have opportunities for turn taking and choice making
The staff:
- listen
- value parents as part of the team
- are open to new ideas
- enjoy being with children
- are warm and affectionate with children
- interact frequently with the children and use names
- explain what is going to happen
- describe what is happening

The physical environment needs to include age appropriate furniture.

Physical environment

Well-lit, organized, and colorful room
Age appropriate furniture and play equipment
Safe, established, well-defined activity areas
Enough room for the number of children
Easily accessible toys and materials



The staff should interact frequently with the children and use their names.

Learning environment

Learning environments for infants, preschoolers, and kindergartners are not the same because the children are at different levels of development. The social and educational environment will vary in each program.

Infant programs

- Adults engage infants in activities
- Adults encourage infant communication
- Infants are encouraged to play with toys
- Infants participate in brief, structured activities

Preschool programs

- The routine includes structured and free play activities
- Language experiences include ways to express feelings and solve problems
- Activities include hands-on experiences such as making cookies
- Activities stress cooperative and imaginative play, such as blocks and dress up
- Activities include messy play and creative experiences such as fingerpainting
- Self-help skills are taught, such as washing hands, toileting, and putting toys away

Preschoc programs nee to include mess play and creativ experience

Activities should include hands-on experiences.

Kindergarten programs

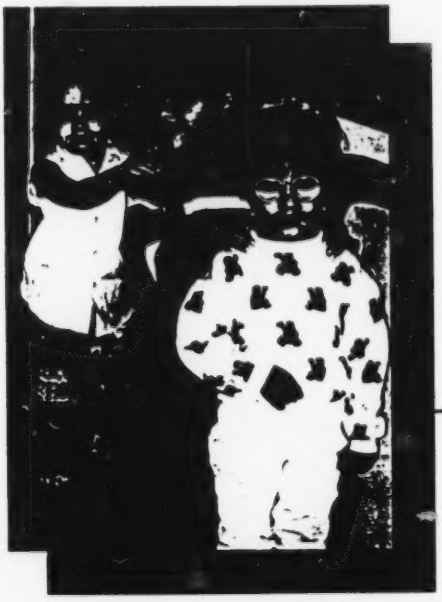
The purpose of many kindergarten programs is to prepare children for school by developing preacademic skills and by requiring cooperation with conventional classroom rules.

Kindergarten skills include:

- Increased independence in completing tasks
- Following directions
- Following classroom rules such as standing in line and raising hands
- Participation in structured group activities
- Participation in reading, writing, and number readiness activities

Questions about a new program...

- How will my child get there?
- When does school start and end?
- What is the school calendar and vacation times?
- What is the teacher's name?
- Who is the program administrator?
- Who do I contact if I have questions?
- What is a typical daily schedule?
- How do I communicate with the teacher when I need to?
- Is there an after-school program, such as extended daycare?



Kindergarten skills include following rules such as standing in line.

Whatever program you choose, it should be able to provide for your child's specific learning needs and build on her strengths and talents.

The following questions can help evaluate a program from your child's point of view...

The learning environment

Close your eyes. What do you hear? Will your child be able to get information in this classroom? Is it too noisy? Will it be a confusing environment for paying attention and for listening to directions?

Are there opportunities for your child to develop auditory skills? These skills include identifying where sounds come from, recognizing different sounds, and understanding the meaning of sounds and words.

How many children and adults are in the room?

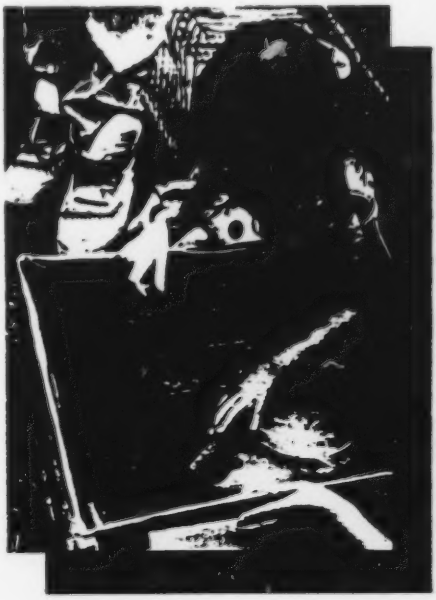
Do the toys and materials encourage touch and handling?

Do toys make sounds and have different textures?

Whenever possible, are real objects used instead of pictures?

Is the lighting appropriate (e.g., minimal glare) for your child's vision needs?

Is contrast maximized to encourage your child's use of vision in the classroom environment? For example, is playdough placed on a tray of contrasting color?



Real objects need to be used in place of pictures.

Does the environment encourage your child to develop orientation and mobility skills? For example, are there landmarks to help orient your child and are routes safe and accessible?

Does the environment encourage exploration and active participation in classroom activities? For example, do the children know where to find toys and materials?

Does the classroom provide opportunities for developing tactile discrimination and braille reading skills? These considerations include handling familiar objects, touching various materials and textures, and using braille books and labels in the classroom.

Teacher competency

Does the teacher have realistic expectations of the children?

Does the teacher give adequate time to complete activities?

Is the teacher responsive to individual needs?

Does the teacher adapt activities when necessary?

Does the teacher encourage children to use a hands-on approach to develop concepts and stimulate learning?

Does the teacher encourage children to actively participate in the classroom routine?

Transition questions

The infant program

What services does my child need?

What services are available?

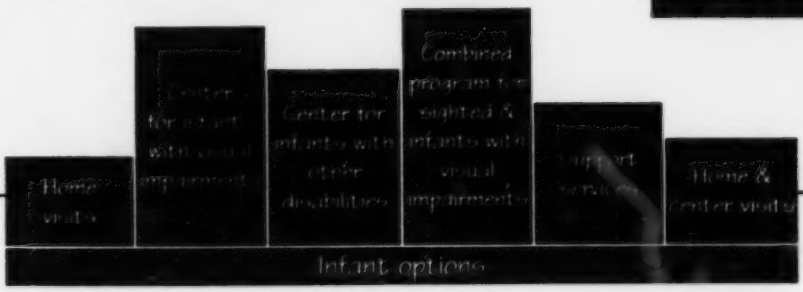
What is expected of me in an infant program?

What will my child learn?

If available, do I want home visits?

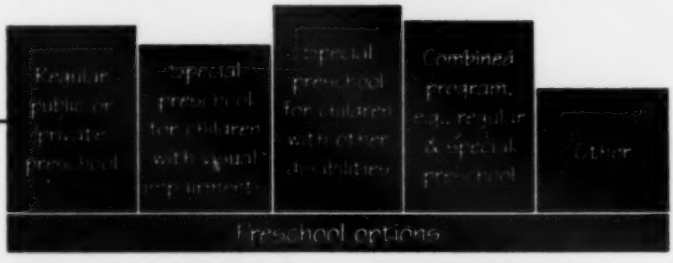
If available, do I want a program at a center?

Are there other families I can talk to?



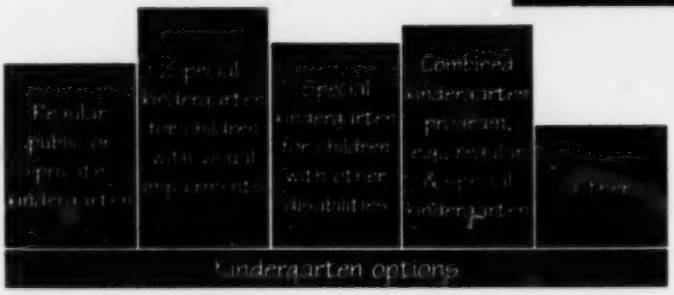
Transition from infant to preschool programs

When is it time to begin thinking about a preschool program?
What are our family's values, concerns and priorities about preschool experiences?
What do children learn in preschool and how is that different from an infant program?
When should I plan to visit preschool programs?
What preschool programs are available?
What services do they provide?
What other services will my child need?
Are there specific entrance requirements for preschool?
How will I be involved in my child's preschool program?


Regular public or private preschool
Special preschool for children with special requirements
Special preschool for children with other disabilities
Combined program, regular & special preschool
Other
Preschool options

Transition from preschool to kindergarten programs

When is it time to think about kindergarten programs?
What are my family's values, concerns, and priorities about kindergartens?
What do children learn in kindergarten and how is that different from preschool?
What does my child need to know to be successful in kindergarten?
When is it time to visit kindergartens?
What kindergarten programs are available?
What services do they provide?
What other services will my child need?


Regular public or private kindergarten
Special kindergarten for children with special requirements
Special kindergarten for children with other disabilities
Combined kindergarten program, regular & special kindergarten
Other
Kindergarten options

Handling the first few weeks

Getting settled into a new program can be comforting. Meeting other parents and making new friends is very supportive. You may experience a sense of freedom, especially if you are not with your child all day. Finally, you have time to relax and pay attention to other things you want to do.

However, the first few weeks in a new program may be hectic for everyone. It takes time to settle into a familiar routine. You may feel somewhat overwhelmed while you and your child get used to a new schedule. Most parents worry when their child goes to school for the first time. The school bus may be late or not show up at all. The new staff may not write notes as regularly as the old staff, or may ask questions that you think they should know if they have read reports on your child. In time, the bus schedule will be worked out, your child will adjust to the new program, the new staff will become familiar with your child, and you will become comfortable with your child being gone for part of the day.

What you can do...

- Be sure you know who to call in case of transportation problems.
- Help your child feel comfortable with the new program by talking in a positive way about the new teacher, activities, and children.
- Invite communication by writing a note to the teacher, asking questions about how your child is doing, and by sharing helpful tips about working with your child.
- Talk to someone who can listen to your concerns and feelings about the first few weeks.

Once your child is enrolled in a new program, you can be involved in different ways. At school, you might participate in the classroom and in other program activities, or volunteer your special talents. In this way, you will become familiar with the school, and your help and ideas will improve the program.

Final thoughts

It is quite an accomplishment when your child completes an infant or preschool program. At each transition, it is important to congratulate yourself and your family on having achieved a milestone in your child's development.

Parents have different ways of handling the transition process. Some parents want to be actively involved, attend meetings, and visit all available programs. Others may prefer to make only a few visits, while some parents may leave the decision making to professionals.

How involved you want to be will depend on your family's concerns, priorities, and level of energy. Your participation may vary at each transition. Trust your instincts.

In time, your child will adjust to the new program, the new staff will become familiar with your child, and you will become comfortable with your child being gone for part of the day.

Acknowledgments

This booklet is the result of the work of many families who have shared their experiences during transitions from one program to another. We appreciate their candor and expertise.

We are grateful to Mardi Robers, Executive Director, and Karren McClenahan, parent, for their helpful feedback and thoughtful comments on the text.

We thank Donna Kaptain, graphic designer, for her creative layout, and Laurie Headley, office services manager, for the photographs which highlight the concepts in the booklet.

Finally, we extend our special appreciation to the Margaret Bundy Scott Trust for supporting the development, production, and distribution of this booklet.

About the authors

Deborah Chen, Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Special Education, California State University, Northridge. She was Project Director of the Parents and Visually Impaired Infants (PAVII) Project in San Francisco, and has worked with programs serving families and young children with visual impairments.

Mary Ellen McCann, M.A., is the Director of Education at the Blind Childrens Center. She has served as a program director and principal of both public school programs and private agencies serving children with special needs and their families.

The Blind Childrens Center

The Blind Childrens Center offers a program of diversified services which meets the special needs of blind, visually impaired, and multihandicapped blind children (ages birth through five years), their parents and siblings at no charge. Services include: Infant Stimulation Program; Education/ Preschool; Family Support Services; Correspondence Program; Toll Free National Phone Line; Publication and Research Program; Internship Opportunities; and Interdisciplinary Assessment Services.

The Blind Childrens Center is a non-profit organization available to blind and partially sighted children regardless of race, color, national or ethnic origin, sex, or religion. Founded in 1919, the Center is a project of the Southern California Delta Gamma. The Blind Childrens Center operates without state or federal assistance.

blind childrens center
[illegible] marathon street•los angeles, california 900[illegible]
[illegible]•(213) 800/222-3567/•USA 800/222-3566•fax (213) [illegible]